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SUBJECT: KENYA ELECTIONS: Kenya Elections: The Swing States Part One: Rift Valley Province

**¶1.** (SBU) Summary: Rift Valley Province (RVP) is one of Kenya's most geographically and ethnically diverse provinces, encompassing both desperately poor arid lands and wealthy agricultural regions. Former President Daniel arap Moi, who is backing the re-election campaign of President Kibaki, hails from RVP, as does MP Nicholas Biwott, widely considered to be one of Kenya's most corrupt and wealthy men, and MP William Ruto, a key member of Odinga's campaign team. Despite Moi's support for Kibaki in his home region, many areas of RVP are leaning heavily towards the main opposition candidate, Raila Odinga. Polling conducted on October 10 and 11 showed that 62 percent of RVP respondents would vote for Odinga for president and 31 percent said they would support Kibaki. During a recent visit to the region by Poloffs, the sentiments of RVP residents appeared to affirm the polling results, as many expressed disappointment that Kibaki had not done more for them, and felt that Odinga was the most likely to make good on his promises. As in other areas of Kenya, Odinga's populist message was especially popular among younger voters, who plan to head to the polls in larger numbers than in previous elections. End summary.

**¶2.** (SBU) Rift Valley Province (RVP), which borders Uganda, is one of Kenya's most populous provinces. Stretching from arid northwestern Kenya down to the Tanzanian border, RVP encompasses a range of landscapes and peoples, and includes Kenya's richest agricultural land (once known as the "White Highlands") and the country's tea-growing center. Major ethnic groups in RVP include the Kalenjin (divided into at least four sub-tribes), Maasai, Kikuyu, Turkana, and Pokot. Former President Daniel arap Moi hails from RVP and owns vast tracts of land there; one of his five sons, Gideon, took over his father's former constituency while two other sons (Jonathan and Raymond) are reportedly planning to run for Parliament in the province. Prominent businessman and politician Nicholas Biwott, linked to high-level corruption scandals during the Moi years, also hails from RVP and represents Keiyo South constituency. On the other side of the contest is MP William Ruto of Eldoret North constituency, a member of Odinga's "Pentagon" campaign team and one of his closest campaign advisors. Ruto, a youthful and energetic leader, seems to be getting the attention of his kinsmen and has been instrumental in swinging large sections of RVP over to the Odinga camp. Like Biwott, however, Ruto has also been linked to some unresolved official corruption cases. RVP is expected to have a significant role in the outcome of the upcoming elections, so Political section staff headed out to the region to take the pulse of the voters.

Moi's Influence on the Wane

**¶3.** (SBU) During his 24 years as President, Moi was

criticized for pouring disproportionate amounts of money into his home district and the larger ethnic Kalenjin zone. The regional center of Eldoret, for example, boasts an underused international airport, a university and teaching hospital, and good roads, a rarity in Kenya. However, many RVP residents complain that the riches bestowed by Moi benefited very few. Despite their former political enmity, Moi has come out in favor of Kibaki's re-election bid. Some commentators have observed that this support is the "payment" for a gentleman's agreement under which Kibaki would not seek to prosecute Moi for past acts of official corruption and would allow him to keep his millions -- millions that many Kenyans allege were stolen over the years from the Kenyan taxpayers. Most local residents thought Moi's influence was minimal, although they noted that his support (and thus, support for Kibaki) is strongest among elderly voters. If Kibaki is counting on Moi to deliver RVP for him, residents warned, he is likely to be disappointed.

#### The Moi Dynasty

¶4. (SBU) Gideon Moi, currently the MP for Baringo Central, his father's former constituency, is running for re-election. His brother Raymond is a candidate for MP in populous and diverse Rongai constituency, running against incumbent Alicen Chelaita. Jonathan Moi is also reported to be standing for a Parliamentary seat. Baringo Central residents were skeptical about Gideon's chances for re-election. One local resident said that Moi's campaign strategy consists of handing out 80 million Kenya shillings (about \$1.2 million) in the weeks immediately preceding the elections. Handouts alone are not enough any more, he added, although many residents might appreciate the irony that a small percentage of Moi senior's ill-gotten gains will finally be returned to the Kenyan taxpayers. We also

heard that incumbent Nicholas Biwott, MP for Keiyo South constituency, may not be returned to office despite a similarly generous campaign strategy. One of his three wives, Professor Margaret Kamar, is standing in the nearby constituency of Eldoret East. A former Vice-Chancellor at Moi University in Eldoret, Kamar is well-respected for her efforts in education, but will have to overcome the handicap of being a woman candidate and of her association with Biwott, which could prove to be unhelpful given his relative unpopularity.

#### Kibaki, Breaker of Promises

¶5. (SBU) We heard repeatedly from Kalenjin voters that they felt Kibaki had not kept his promises to address issues of landlessness and to institute constitutional reform. After independence, Kikuyu from Central province moved up to RVP in search of work and purchased land there. In the 1990s, ethnic clashes over land rights led to many of these Kikuyu being displaced by Kalenjin. The Kibaki government had pledged to resettle some landless Kikuyu in Nakuru, but did not follow through. Many of these people are still living in church camps or on the streets in Nakuru town. The youth, largely unemployed and uneducated, are ripe for recruitment by criminal gangs like the Mungiki and are no longer interested in rural resettlement. Many residents also commented on Kibaki's failure to pass constitutional reform, as well as his failure to act against official corruption and to bring about more equitable distribution of resources. (Note: The 2005 constitutional referendum, which proposed government-backed reforms, was soundly defeated. End note.) Kibaki has achieved some good things, residents agreed, but it appears that the deficits are overshadowing the achievements in the minds of the voters at this stage in the campaign.

#### Youth Voters: Take Us Seriously

¶6. (SBU) Odinga's message of populism and change has strong appeal to young Kenyan voters. Kenya's demography is very young, with 42 percent of the population under 14 and more

than 25 percent of the population between the ages of 15 and 25. Civic education and more exposure to media coverage of the political scene are likely to result in a larger number of young voters heading to the polls in this election than in 2002. In the central Rift Valley town of Iten, we passed an impromptu political rally being held by a candidate for the local civic council. The audience of young men, mainly unemployed and selling small items to try and support themselves, was told that, if they voted for him, this candidate would buy them so much beer that they would fall down drunk in the gutter. Indignant, they asked, "Is that all they think of us? We have serious concerns. We want to be taken seriously." So far, the Kibaki campaign has drawn its strongest support from older voters. Given the importance of the youth vote, Kibaki will need to make an effort to address youth concerns, primarily education and employment. Kibaki will also need to overcome the perception among many youth that it is time for his generation to retire. "They have been in government many years and have done very little in that time," said one local NGO employee. "It's time for the old guys to go out."

#### Majimbo and Revenge

¶7. (SBU) One issue playing out on the national stage, majimboism, is on RVP voters' minds, although there is much confusion and disagreement about what it actually means. Majimboism is loosely and confusedly defined as federalism or devolution. Odinga has made majimbo a cornerstone of his campaign, promising that constituencies would get to keep 60 percent or more of their locally-generated revenues instead of handing money over to the national government and waiting for the government to allocate it back to the provinces and districts. Regions would also have their own locally elected leaders, rather than being governed by the present provincial administration system, which is appointed by and reports to the national government. Majimbo supporters also believe that the 40 percent of constituency revenues that would be retained by the central government will be redistributed from wealthy regions to underdeveloped arid and semi-arid areas, resulting in economic empowerment for impoverished regions of Kenya. Kibaki supporters, however, argue that Odinga's majimbo system would translate into divisiveness, and that it will trigger a kind of ethnic cleansing, as tribes who have relocated away from their traditional home areas would be forced out in favor of "indigenous" residents. Jayne Kihara, the MP for Naivasha constituency in the southern

Rift Valley, described majimboism as "tribalism, not

federalism." Many Kibaki supporters also express the fear that Odinga, if elected, would use his position to seek revenge against other ethnic groups believed to be responsible for the unsolved killings of Luo leaders Tom Mboya and former foreign minister Robert Ouko. A detailed analysis of the majimbo issue will follow septel.

#### Comment

¶8. (SBU) This year's elections are expected to be hotly contested at the Presidential level and in many of the Parliamentary races. In many of the multi-ethnic constituencies of RVP, candidates will have to appeal to a broad spectrum of the local population to be successful. The youth vote is also likely to be important, and is currently skewing strongly towards Odinga and his message of change and empowerment. Kibaki and his Party of National Unity (PNU) supporters have largely been absent from the campaign trail to date, while Odinga and his Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) allies are aggressively campaigning in the field. One observer likened Kibaki's campaign to "a student who puts off studying until the week before exams" and then wonders why he does not pass. Kibaki is taking the voters for granted, we heard, and does not recognize that the open democratic space he helped to create will devour him if he does not begin a concerted and coordinated effort to reach out to other ethnic groups and

youth voters. RVP will be a pivotal area in the elections. Along with Western and Coast provinces, a successful Presidential candidate will have to do well in this area in order to secure victory. Post will continue to monitor events in RVP and will include some key RVP constituencies in our election observation efforts.

RANNEBERGER